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E.O. 12958: DECL: 01/22/2019
TAGS: [OFDP](#) [ODIP](#) [PREL](#) [BM](#)
SUBJECT: BURMA INFORMALLY REQUESTS TO UPGRADE ITS
WASHINGTON COM TO AMBASSADOR

Classified By: Charge D'Affaires Larry Dinger for Reasons 1.4 (b) & (d)

Informal request: signal willingness to grant agreement for an
ambassador

11. (C) On Jan. 21, Paw Lwin Sein, Director General, Training, Research, and Foreign Language Department, Burmese Ministry of Foreign Affairs, took the opportunity of a social event to pass emboff an oral message from Minister of Foreign Affairs Nyan Win. The Government of Burma would like to upgrade the Burmese Chief of Mission status in Washington from Charge d'Affaires to Ambassador. In doing so, Burma would replace its incumbent Charge, a career military officer, with a civilian Foreign Service Officer. The explanation for Minister Nyan Win's request was that, since the current U.S. Charge d'Affaires in Rangoon "is an ambassador by virtue of prior posts," it is time to approach the new U.S. Administration informally to seek to install a career diplomat in place of a career military officer as Ambassador to the United States. The Minister is hoping for a reply within a reasonable period of time. Paw Lwin Sein expressed hope that the new U.S. Administration would allow more dialogue between the governments of Burma and the United States, and that the information he conveyed might be a starting point.

History

12. (C) The United States removed the "ambassador" title from its Chief of Mission in Rangoon in about 1990, in reaction to the bloody suppression of peaceful demonstrations for democracy in 1988 and the Burmese regime's refusal to accept the result of elections in 1990 that should have brought Aung San Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy to power. Since then, Washington has sent seven chiefs of mission to Rangoon as charge. We are told that the USG continued to accept Burmese ambassadors to Washington until sometime in the current decade when the USG didn't act on Burma's agreement request for a new ambassador, leaving the GOB little option but to send a Charge.

Comment

13. (C) We are confident Paw Lwin Sein was acting under instruction from his boss the Foreign Minister. It is extremely likely that the Minister only ordered the approach after receiving approval from the most senior generals. FYI: Charge Dinger has been very careful to label himself "charge," not "ambassador" in Burma. Burma MFA's diplomatic list continues to place the U.S. Charge below all ambassadors, including those more recently arrived, in the formal pecking order. That said, many others in the diplomatic corps are aware of the Charge's past ambassadorships and routinely call him "ambassador." Except for not having a credentials-presentation ceremony with

Senior General Than Shwe and not moving up the dip list, Charge Dinger has experienced no noticeable disadvantage from his current status. He has obtained access similar to that of other active Western COMs to engage with GOB Ministers, the head of Military Intelligence, and others.

14. (S) The inquiry from MFA suggests some degree of discomfort with the current COM situation in Washington. It also fits with other recent indications of possible regime interest in increasing engagement with the United States, including SPDC Vice Chairman Maung Aye's invitation for a senior U.S. military official to visit Burma and reports in other channels. Unfortunately, we have seen no indication that the regime is, in the words of President Obama's inauguration speech, opening its clenched fist at home. Still, to the extent the new Administration is interested and circumstances merit, a positive response to the GOB's "ambassador" request could be a way to start increasing direct Washington contact with the GOB in pursuit of our political reform agenda.
DINGER